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Voice to Vision: Seven Activists and a Brother

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“Seven Activists and a Brother”

In 2002, Professor David Feinberg of the University of Minnesota formed Voice to Vision in cooperation with the University’s Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies. The organization was founded with the primary goal of documenting and memorializing the extraordinary experiences of genocide survivors through collaborative works of art in order to inspire and educate others. This concept spurred from Professor Feinberg’s belief in the power of art to inform and transform as well as his passion for history. I have had the privilege of working with this project for the past year and a half as the social media coordinator and collaborative artist assisting in the completion of five projects and conduction of twelve interviews. Working with Voice to Vision has given me the opportunity to expand my knowledge on human atrocities in the world, as well as analyze new perspectives through an artistic lens.

The main focus of the past year in Voice to Vision centered on our ninth project titled “Seven Activists and a Brother.” It is a project created by seven human rights activists who participated in *The State of the Iberoamerican Studies Series: Human*

Rights Across the Disciplines conference at the University of Minnesota in March of 2014 and the brother of one of the activists. This project was slightly different than previous Voice to

Vision works because we did not work with survivors of human atrocities, but instead focused on people who dedicate their lives to protecting human rights and therefore attempting



Eight Participants and the V2V Team

to eliminate those atrocities. The eight individuals we worked with were Luis Ramos-Garcia, Ernesto Silva, Demetrio Anzaldo Gonzalez, Davide Carnevali, Carlos Satizabal, Gerson Guerra, Paulo Guerra, and Nelsy Echavez Solano; coming from various locations in Peru, Mexico, Italy, Ecuador, and Columbia. This particular project began with personal testimonies from each of the eight collaborators. Sharing personal testimony can be uncomfortable at first, which we battled with a few Voice to Vision tactics. First, each participant was asked to create a collage from a set of abstract images. Next, our team presented the activists with nine photographs representing different occupations, and asked them to use their abstract image collage to determine which photograph they were drawn to. The activists then told their personal stories based on their selections, and were asked to use their hands to create

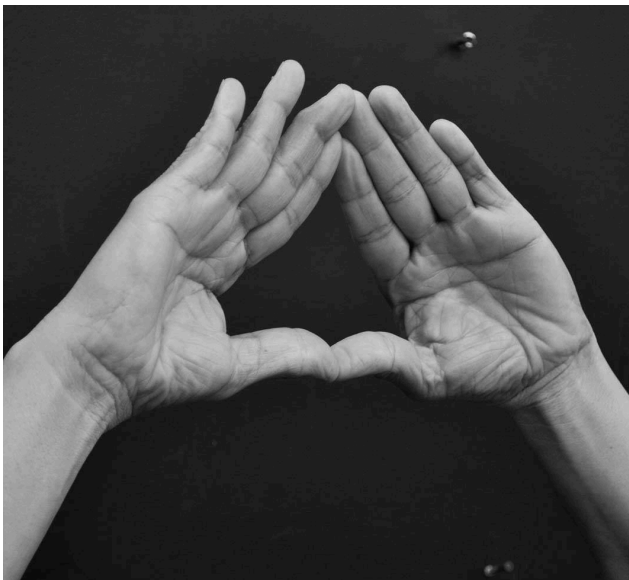
a personal symbol. These creative tactics allow the participants to relax and promotes a low-pressure artistic environment.

An example of this process can be seen in the testimony of Ernesto Silva, an Associate Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies and Spanish at Kennesaw State University. During his interview with Voice to Vision, Ernesto created a collage of shapes that he associated with the creation of life, offspring, and family. Prompted by these concepts, he chose the occupation of nurse from the photographs and spoke of the oppression he faced after the birth of his son in Las Vegas. Ernesto is an immigrant from Peru and the mother of the child was born in the United States. Ernesto told us of the apprehension the woman had about allowing him to spend time with their son because of his race, and she eventually took Ernesto's son away. This experience largely affected Ernesto, and he utilizes his personal pain in his current academic work, which mainly centers on immigration. Each of the eight individuals had a unique story to share based on their selections, which allowed our team a basic understanding of their diverse perspectives.

Once we concluded the interviews, the Voice to Vision team began to piece together personal testimonies to create a cohesive piece of artwork. Because of the diversity in location of the eight individuals, our team used Skype and email to include them in the collaborative process; a signature feature of Voice to Vision. Professor Feinberg asks for each team member to share their opinion, and no move is made without full approval from everyone involved. Much of "Seven Activists and a Brother" is made up of personal photos, the individual's collages, hand symbols, and small items used as representation of larger ideas. This is true for many Voice to Vision pieces, as they are

typically in a multimedia format and have a larger impact if there is a visible personal story. This impact is exemplified through Carlos Satizabal's collage, which is included in the final artwork. During the first interview day, Carlos described his collage as fragmented, which he associated with war: an ever-present reality in his home of Columbia. Carlos stated, "War divides us, cuts us, separates us, makes us run away." A search for peace was common among all eight participants, and his collage was a powerful representation of the fragmented tension in its absence.

After just over a year of collaborative decisions, "Seven Activists and a Brother"



Demetrio Anzaldo Gonzalez's Hand Symbol

was completed as the ninth Voice to Vision project. As a collaborative artist, my largest contribution was photographing and editing all of the participants' hand symbols. These symbols were meant to represent their personal story and mindset. Demetrio Anzaldo Gonzalez created a triangle hand symbol that is included in the

piece. He explained this choice as, "The triangle for me has no specific position. You can twist it, turn it around, because everything is in movement." He spoke of triangles symbolizing his inclination to see everything from different angles and perspectives. This concept fits in well with the purpose of Voice to Vision.

When I was not working on artwork, my main role was promoting the project through social media. Because Voice to Vision has an educational focus, there is a high

priority to spread the word and make our works seen. Through our social media outlets, we have spread the word regarding many projects, as well as held successful events presenting our works and video documentation of the process. I have gained so much knowledge and invaluable experiences from working with Voice to Vision. Each individual I had the pleasure of working with opened my eyes to a new story and have shown me the power of art to educate as well as inspire. By turning voice into vision, I have been able to open my own mindset, as well as spread this awareness and knowledge to the public.